

VZCZCXR07455

RR RUEHBZ RUEHMR RUEHPA RUEHRN RUEHTRO

DE RUEHYD #0972/01 3171438

ZNY CCCCC ZZH

R 131438Z NOV 09

FM AMEMBASSY YAOUNDE

TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 0455

INFO RUEHZO/AFRICAN UNION COLLECTIVE

RHMFISS/HQ USAFRICOM STUTTGART GE

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 YAOUNDE 000972

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 11/13/2019

TAGS: CM PGOV

SUBJECT: BIYA AT 27 WRITES A LETTER TO THE PEOPLE

REF: A. YAOUNDE 786

1B. YAOUNDE 724

Classified By: PolEcon Chief Scott Ticknor for reasons 1.4 (b) and (c)

11. (U) Summary: On November 5, the occasion of the day marking the 27th anniversary of his ascension to the Presidency, Paul Biya published an open letter in French and English to his "dear compatriots" and "dear CPDM Militants." Taking up two pages in each of the major dailies, both state-run and private, the article featured a photo of the President presumably signing the letter. Using flowery language, Biya talked in unspecific terms about the future of Cameroon and his priorities. Below are selected highlights.  
End summary.

Peace, Unity and Democracy

12. (U) Biya began by trumpeting the 27th anniversary of the "New Deal" (Renouveau National) and saying he would like to talk about the future of Cameroon, "which depends on each and every one of us." He then noted "(w)hen we look at the world around us, we appreciate better . . . the need to specially and jealously ensure the strengthening of peace, reinforcement of democracy and consolidation of unity . . . ." He cautioned, however, "(peace, unity and democracy), despite their importance, cannot be ends in themselves. Peace, democracy and unity can be meaningful only if they contribute to the overall development of the individual . . . ."

Biya,s Agenda

13. (U) Biya claimed much progress during his 27 year reign, "despite all kinds of obstacles, especially recurrent crises which substantially deplete our resources, as well as our own shortcomings, particularly inertia, corruption and the embezzlement of public funds . . . ." He promised to "improve living conditions," "fight poverty," and "pay particular attention to the implementation of identified major projects which will help in building the Cameroon of tomorrow." Finally, he said he will "search for solutions to the thorny problem of youth unemployment . . ." and "pursue the moralization of behaviors and the fight against corruption and embezzlement of public funds."

Biya,s Secret: The Soccer Team

14. (U) Finally, the notoriously enigmatic leader said he would like to trust his compatriots and CPDM militants with a "secret" if they "do not mind." His secret: "Whenever I happen to ponder over our national stakes and our common destiny as it is certainly the case for each of you, I think of the Indomitable Lions who are strongest when their backs are against the wall and who always rise whenever they fall."

Media Criticism

-----  
¶ 15. (SBU) Biya's letter dominated all local press for several days. The independent press derisively interpreted it as launching his campaign for 2011. Le Jour newspaper ran a story the same day the letter came out entitled "Bamenda: Philemon Yang (the Prime Minister) Launches the Campaign for Paul Biya's Re-election." Major daily Le Messager ran an article entitled "If Biya Would Leave Today . . .", concluding "(Biya's) greatest political accomplishment would be to have conferred power on a monolithic political party . . ." La Nouvelle Expression newspaper ridiculed the reference to the Cameroonian national soccer team as a way to turn attention away from the scandals involving Biya's ill-gotten gains and his \$1 million summer vacation (ref A).

Comment  
-----

¶ 16. (C) Biya's first-ever letter to the Cameroonian people is seen by some as an attempt to innovate with new methods of communication. However, the letter keeps to broad platitudes designed to make his audience feel good and have patience. It is one more sign that Biya will run in the scheduled 2011 election. The fact that he placed the letter in the private as well as the government media - a highly unusual step - is further proof he has entered campaign mode. The choice of publishing a letter to the people suggests Biya's campaign style will remain characteristically at arms length. When in Cameroon, he hasn't been outside of Yaounde, except to visit his home village, since 2005. He has spent up to a third of the last year outside Cameroon. Biya seems content to have

YAOUNDE 00000972 002 OF 002

surrogates rally for his leadership, trumpet the 27 year-old "New" Deal, and trot out the soccer team ) a formula which leaves most Cameroonian cynical about the prospects for positive change.

GARVEY